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THE INDYPENDENT

#291 DECEMBER 2024

ESTEBAN JIMENEZ

ONWARD

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THE INDYPENDENT

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EDITOR'S NOTE

KEEP THE PRESSES ROLLING

THE DEMOCRATS HAVE DONE IT AGAIN. *For the second time in eight years, the party of cosmopolitan neoliberalism has lost to the party of patriarchal, white-supremacist neoliberalism. This time, President-elect Donald Trump, 78, can barely speak in coherent sentences as he rages about his desire to avenge himself.*

In this period between the election and the inauguration, we wait and wonder like a patient waiting for their cancer biopsy to come back. How bad is it going to be? Are we doomed? Is there still time to beat this thing and fully recover?

The signs are mixed. Going by his cabinet appointees (see page 10), it's clear Trump is intent on establishing a mafia state with himself as the boss surrounded by loyal underlings who will carry out his commands without question. Given the incompetence of Trump and many of his top appointees, this whole thing could implode soon after lift off like one of Elon Musk's faulty SpaceX rockets.

But enough of Trump, what are the rest of us going to do?

■ ■ ■

THESE NEXT FEW YEARS *are going to be a bumpy ride with many outrageous moments to come. Try not to become isolated in your thoughts, doomscrolling on your phone for hours as our billionaire tech overlords would like you to do.*

We're going to need each other more than ever — and would do well to slow down our busy lives to enjoy moments of connection with each other and the natural world around us. One way to avoid isolation and despair is to join a political organization (see page 11) that believes in the power of collection action and that feels like a good fit for you."Better to light a candle than curse the darkness," as the saying goes.

In New York City, we're fortunate to have a plethora of options — labor unions (if you are fortunate enough to belong to one), tenant unions, antiwar groups, community organizations, neighborhood-based mutual aid groups, and also larger organizations like the Working Families Party and the New York City Democratic Socialists of America. New York City-DSA has more than 6,000 members and among its many political, cultural and educational activities, is running a candidate for mayor, Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani, who is already making waves in that race.

■ ■ ■

NONE OF US WANT *to be in this situation. But we can't say that authoritarian rule is alien to the American experience.*

Just ask Black Americans who saw white terrorists in the South overthrow a decade-long experiment in multi-racial democracy following the Civil War and replace Reconstruction with Jim Crow. Or women who didn't have the right to vote until 1920, who didn't have full civil rights and control over their bodies until the 1970s. Or striking workers who were once routinely massacred by government and private security forces for demanding a better life. The 40-hour week and the weekend didn't just happen.

In Latin America, military dictatorships were once common. Democracies currently led by bold, progressive leaders in Brazil, Chile, Columbia and Mexico were autocracies within my lifetime. What goes down can also go back up again.

We have more freedom today than the protagonists in these past struggles had. So we should use it while we still have it and use it well.

■ ■ ■

ONE LAST THING. *We're going to see an unprecedented assault on the idea of truth from Trump and his minions. We got a glimpse into how large corporate-media outlets will respond when* Washington Post *owner Jeff Bezos pulled out of a pro-Kamala Harris endorsement 11 days before the election to curry favor with Trump. Here at* The Indypendent, *we report and publish the kind of honest, incisive grassroots journalism you expect from us. By way of our newspaper, website, weekly Tuesday 5–6 p.m. radio show on WBAI-99.5 FM, social-media platforms, weekly e-newsletter and live events, we'll continue to be a unique space in the New York City media landscape where social movements of many stripes can be seen and heard.*

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Thank you for your support.

Onward,

John Tarleton
Editor-in-Chief
THE INDYPENDENT

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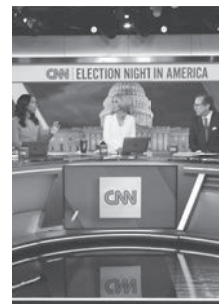

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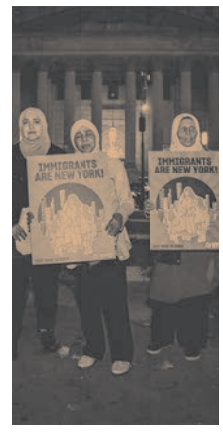

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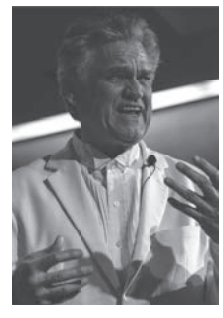

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NYC'S RED SHIFT

AND THE MAYOR WHO NEEDS A PARDON

NEIL CONSTANTINE

CIRCUS TIME: *Trump supporters line up outside Madison Square Garden for his Oct. 27 campaign rally.*

By Theodore Hamm

Do last week's vote totals in New York City augur a sea change in local politics?

In 2020 Trump gained over five points from his first run, coming in at 23%. This year he surpassed 30%.

A map in *The City* shows that "nearly every NYC neighborhood shifted toward Trump." Local vote wiz Michael Lange thus sees a "realignment" that makes 40% a plausible share for Republicans in the near future.

But as Mark Twain once said, "There are lies, damn lies and statistics."

The problem with the "red wave" argument is that it relies on percentages, not total votes. Harris' tallies dropped everywhere across the city. In some places, Trump got more votes than in 2024, but in other places, he took home fewer. Either way, the dropoff in Harris votes led to a spike in Trump's percentage.

A map in a different story in *The City* makes it easy to see the shifts in total votes. Consider Bay Ridge. In 2020 Biden carried it 62–36%. This year Harris prevailed 54–42%. The percentage map presents that as a significant shift towards the GOP.

But in terms of total votes, Harris got 6,400 less votes in Bay Ridge than Biden — and Trump got 900 less than he did in 2020. Using the percentage shift can thus be quite misleading in areas across the city.

As for why support for the Democratic ticket plummeted in Bay Ridge, Gaza appears to be the main reason, given the area's sizable Palestinian community. It is also a leading factor in the dropoff in many left-wing areas, including Astoria and Bushwick.

Jasmine Gripper, co-chair of the New York Working Families Party, told *NY Focus* Gaza was an issue across the city, pointing to 50,000 blank votes on the presidential line (many fulfilling the pledge of the Leave it Blank campaign).

Local election strategists certainly need to pay attention to areas where Trump's total votes distinctly improved, such as the Chinatowns of Brooklyn and Queens, the Colombian-American stronghold of North Corona, Queens, or among Dominicans and Puerto Ricans in the Central Bronx.

But it's plausible that the convulsions of Trump's second term may make many Democratic voters come out in force in next year's city elections.

■ ■ ■

There has been no shortage of media conjecture about what Trump's win might mean for Mayor Eric Adams. One overlooked scenario is that once he takes office, Trump can simply pardon Adams from the federal charges the mayor faces.

Gerald Ford preemptively pardoned Nixon, and Jimmy Carter did so for Vietnam-War draft resisters. Given his abundant vanity, Adams might be thrilled to join such notable ranks.

For Trump, Adams could be a valuable Black ally. The mayor's declaration last year that the migrant influx "will destroy New York City" may have been overblown rhetoric, but any and all apocalyptic warnings are music to Trump's ears.

Any beneficial action by Trump on Adams' behalf is unlikely to help the mayor in the June Democratic primary. That will be the first time voters get to express their views about Trump's second term, which is likely to be tumultuous.

In a recent *New York Times*/Siena College poll, Adams received only 12% support in his reelection bid. The poll, however, included two candidates not currently in the race, Andrew Cuomo (22%) and Letitia James (19%). Most problematic for Adams is that only 15% of Black people along with 8% of voters over 65 backed him in the poll.

He nonetheless seems determined to stay in the public eye (see: vanity). This leads to another scenario: Adams runs as a Republican in the general election for mayor.

In his early career, Adams was a Giuliani Republican, so it's not a big shift for him. Ideologically, he is in sync with MAGA. In addition to being pro-cop and anti-immigrant, Adams has no qualms about imposing (unnecessary) austerity measures, such as cutbacks in library funding.

If one goes by the "red wave" map, an Adams run on the GOP line next November may sound viable. But the total numbers of Trump voters were not large this year in Black neighborhoods in Harlem, central Brooklyn or southeastern Queens. While it is possible that Trump's support could help win some Latino support for Adams, it is also likely that some city Republicans will never vote for a Black mayor.

Regardless of how Adams' legal woes play out, the city will face significant turmoil in 2025. Adams will likely use his friendly relationship with Trump as a selling point to voters, assuring them that things "will be worse" without him.

Adams may not be the savior that nearly 90% of city voters want. Yet both he and Trump insist that God put them in office. It is a vengeful God for sure.

ASH MARINACCIO

N•Y•C BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

VOTERS OK FOUR OF ADAMS' FIVE CITY CHARTER CHANGES

New York city voters approved four of the five city-charter changes that Mayor Eric Adams rushed onto the ballot to preempt an amendment City Council passed in June that would have given it the power to confirm 20 more mayoral nominees for city commissioners. Two of them will slow the council's procedures: Measure 3 requires it to prepare a fiscal-impact statement before holding hearings on any proposed law and to give the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget eight days' notice to submit a response. That "will grind government to a halt," Council Finance Committee Chair Justin Brannan told *The City* in July. Measure 4 mandates 30 days' notice before the council can vote on any bill affecting the Police, Corrections or Fire Departments. In January it overrode Adams' vetoes of bills requiring more reporting on police stops and banning solitary confinement in city jails in January. Another change, Measure 2, will give the Department of Sanitation enforcement powers over vendors in city parks.

COUNCIL VOTES TO END BROKER FEES, WILL ADAMS VETO IT?

The City Council voted overwhelmingly Nov. 13 to prohibit landlords from charging incoming tenants brokers' fees for apartments. Councilmember Chi Ossé (D-Brooklyn), the bill's lead sponsor, said the 42–8 vote was "a veto-proof supermajority ending forced broker fees." Ossé, the Council's youngest member, told *The City* he conceived the bill after trying to rent apartments where he would have had to pay a broker fee to the landlord even if he never saw a broker. "I'm not anti-broker," he said. "I'm anti people being forced to pay for something they didn't hire." Fees are typically 10% to 15% of the annual rent, in a system that is rare outside of New York and Boston. The real-estate lobby campaigned against the bill, arguing landlords would just add the cost to the rent. Mayor Eric Adams echoed that argument after the vote. He also seemed to think that a typical broker fee was $800.

PARKS DEPARTMENT LAYOFFS HELP FIRES SPREAD

More than 250 brush fires blazed in city parks in the first two weeks of November, barely four months after budget cuts forced the Parks Department to lay off workers whose job is to prevent fires. Among the 768 parks workers axed were 51 forestry specialists from the Natural Resources Group, who clear out combustible matter such as dead trees and invasive species. "The Natural Resources Group is now dwindling down to single digits," Adam Ganser, head of New Yorkers for Parks, told *Hell Gate*. The group is also responsible for maintaining trails to keep them from becoming overgrown — as were the trails in Inwood Hill Park, where a fire devastated four acres on Nov. 13. It is "only funded to manage 384 of 12,000 acres of natural parkland," City Councilmember Justin Brannan told *Hell Gate*. "It's just not sustainable."

IN THE HOUSE: *City Councilmember Chi Ossé (D-Bed-Stuy) speaks at a Nov. 13 rally at City Hall calling for the end of forced real estate broker fees.*

ZOHRAN MAMDANI ENTERS MAYOR'S RACE

Astoria Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani has become the fifth candidate to challenge Mayor Eric Adams in next June's Democratic primary. "I'm running for Mayor to lower the cost of living for working-class New Yorkers," Mamdani announced on Oct. 23. The democratic socialist's platform includes freezing rents for all rent-stabilized tenants, making city buses free, and free child care for children aged six weeks to five years, with workers' pay brought up to parity with public-school teachers. Housing costs are "the number-one reason working families are leaving our city," says Mamdani. The challengers also include City Comptroller Brad Lander, former comptroller Scott Stringer, and state senators Jessica Ramos of Queens and Zellnor Myrie of Brooklyn. All five are liberal to leftist, which would have hopelessly split the anti-Adams vote before ranked-choice voting was established in 2021.

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RUNNING ON EMPTY

HOW THE DEMOCRATS LOST TO TRUMP FOR THE 2ND TIME IN 8 YEARS

By Danny Katch

Kamala Harris, the commentators widely agreed, ran a nearly perfect campaign. She hit her cues, avoided mistakes, and was really good at laughing for no reason other than her joy at being our next president. Her campaign skillfully choreographed support from a cast that ranged from the socialist firebrand Bernie Sanders to the conservative Republican Liz Cheney. Not to mention all the celebrities!

It's almost unfair that the object of a presidential campaign is to win the most electoral votes rather than the highest scores from a panel of talk show hosts and former Obama speech writers.

Still, even after the results came in, giving Donald Trump a sweeping Electoral College victory and the first Republican popular vote majority in twenty years, the immediate reaction in many quarters was to insist Harris had done the best she could in the face of voter bigotry and global inflation that has caused many incumbent parties to lose office around the globe.

(Few mentioned Claudia Sheinbaum (see page 14), who just months ago ran on the incumbent party ticket and became the first woman — and first Jewish — president of the country directly south of us. But that's a left-wing party that angered elites and reduced economic inequality, which for our media makes what happened in Mexico about as relevant as the far side of the moon.)

In fairness to Harris, her campaign was indeed more functional than the weird Trump operation where an obviously declining candidate turned over essential operations to his usual assortment of eccentric billionaires and trolling influencers. But in 2024 having a smoothly running machine mattered less than convincing people that you are actually going to do something different.

For as long as he's been in politics, polls have shown that most people don't like Donald Trump, and that didn't change this year. Exit polls indicate that Harris slightly led Trump in "favorability." She lost because voters don't like Trump, but they don't like our system even more.

CHENEY YOU CAN BELIEVE IN

If Kamala Harris and the Democratic Party ran a great campaign, the fault must lie with us. And so liberals eagerly turned to debate which identity groups will go down in history as the cause of ending civilization as we know it: *It was "Black men" for allowing a small minority of their demographic to vote for Trump! No it was "white women" for turning out to be white and not just women! Or maybe it was "trans people" for…existing, thereby giving Republicans an issue to attack us on!*

The only thing anyone can possibly learn from this "debate" is the emptiness that exists at the core of what passes for coalition building in the Democratic Party.

On the left we have no problem blaming Harris and the Democrats, but we get stuck in our own dead-end debate: identity vs. class. Harris, the argument goes, didn't offer anything enough to the struggling working class and focused instead on appeals to gender, race and sexuality that without a class component appeal mainly to middle-class liberals.

The first half of this argument is undoubtedly true. Democrats spent much of Biden's term claiming that complaints about inflation — which many economists say has hit working people harder than any time since 1980 — were just right-wing propaganda. Turns out that's bad politics.

But the second half presumes the Harris campaign actually offered something more substantial to various "identities." What, exactly? She moved hard to the right on blocking immigration, did her best to ignore trans rights, and was an active participant in the Gaza genocide that enraged Arabs and Muslims.

The only exception is abortion… kind of. Harris loudly warned about Trump's threats to reproductive freedom and, more quietly, mentioned she favored getting rid of the Senate filibuster so that Democrats could conceivably pass pro-choice legislation. But then she spent the final weeks of her campaign touring with Cheney, who regularly voted against abortion access and trans rights before she was ousted from office like most other anti-Trump Republicans.

Most voters may not be aware of Liz Cheney's voting record (although many of them remember that her father Dick as the war criminal Vice President who helped push the disastrous wars in Iraq and Afghanistan). But they could pick up the vibe that any campaign being promoted by a Cheney scion and pillar of the old Republican establishment was unlikely to fight for any kind of equality, economic or social.

After all, for the past decade we've seen Trump prove the inverse: the political potency in angering and frightening his opponents, how getting under the skin of CNN anchors and insulting progressive billionaires can make his supporters feel (rather pathetically) empowered.

Democrats aggressively refuse to learn anything from this. They think they can make bigots and billionaires feel entirely at home in their campaign — as long as they're anti-Trump — and the rest of us will still believe in their commitment to defending trans rights. Or immigrants. Or unions. Or Social Security. Or anything.

THE INVISIBLE LEFT

A full accounting of the election can't focus exclusively on the Democrats' failures to address working-class anger over inflation. Yes, the economy has been very bad for working people, but, as a friend of mine put it, it was "throw the bums out" bad, not "let's turn to fascism" bad.

JOY WAS NOT ENOUGH: *Kamala Harris stopped talking about how she would fight for working class Americans out of deference to her supporters on Wall Street and in Silicon Valley.*

Post-pandemic inflation can't explain why one of America's two parties has been transformed into a demented far-right project. Trumpism offers far more than an outlet for economic frustration; it puts forward an emotional narrative to address the existential fears of life in a declining empire on a dying planet. That narrative is a muddled and ever-changing cinematic universe of scapegoats, conspiracies, Christianity and now Elon Musk jokes. But at least it seems to recognize the dark horizon we are rapidly approaching. In contrast, the Democrats' primary message about the future is, "Look, we'll talk about that later. For now, just help us hold back the Trump tide. Again."

That turned out not to be enough. To stop the far right, we need an actual left. That left was reborn in the last 10 years through street rebellions and election campaigns, Native-led pipeline blockades and university-solidarity encampments. That left still exists, but it was absent from the 2024 presidential race. Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez being some of the last defenders of Joe Biden's farcical campaign symbolized a surrender whose causes need to be sorted out in the coming weeks and months.

Once they stopped feeling pressure from a rising left, the Democrats quickly snapped back to their natural place at the center-right of the political spectrum. All the while Trump has permanently changed the shape of the opposition to the point where none of us can say what the coming years of Republican rule will look like. As we try to figure out how to resist, we have to draw some conclusions about the left's failure to do anything similar inside the Democratic Party over the last eight years. Right now I'm only ready to offer one: Guys, I don't think Kamala Harris ran a perfect campaign.

LABOR BRIEFS

BY INDYPENDENT STAFF

LAURA BRETT

LABOR LAW: *Amazon Labor Union members march in Lower Manhattan on Labor Day 2022. The NLRB's pro-worker stances have aided union organizing campaigns by ALU and others.*

NLRB BANS CAPTIVE AUDIENCE MEETINGS

The National Labor Relations Board ruled Nov. 13 that mandatory captive-audience meetings are illegal under federal labor law. In a 3-1 decision, it held that Amazon violated the National Labor Relations Act at its two Staten Island warehouses in 2021 "by requiring employees under threat of discipline or discharge to attend meetings in which the employer expresses its views on unionization." The board overruled a 1948 precedent it said interfered with workers' legal rights to make a free choice on whether to unionize. It ruled that employers could hold meetings to express their views as long as attendance was voluntary and not recorded. Republican board member Marvin E. Kaplan dissented, arguing employers had First Amendment rights and presenting their case against unionization was no different from holding a mandatory meeting on safety procedures.

UNIONS TRYING TO RENEW NLRB CHAIR'S TERM

With National Labor Relations Board Chair Lauren McFerran's term expiring in December, unions and some Democrats are urging Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY) to reconfirm her during the lame-duck session. Though her reappointment would be paired with nominating Republican Joshua Ditelberg to fill a vacancy, it would ensure that Democrats keep a 3–2 majority until 2026, preventing a Trump-packed NLRB from reversing recent pro-labor NLRB decisions. Both nominations have been approved by a committee, but the Senate leadership would have to make bringing them to the floor a priority. "We have to use every minute left in the end-of-year legislative session to confirm federal judges and key regulators like Lauren McFerran," Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) said in a statement to *HuffPost*. Meanwhile Republicans have mulled firing Democratic NLRB board members outright and seeing if they can get away with it, while Elon Musk's SpaceX company has a suit pending in federal court that argues the NLRB's structure is unconstitutional.

EDS & MEDS KEEP ON ORGANIZING

Thousands of health-care and university workers advanced towards union representation in November. In southeastern Michigan, more than 9,600 nurses in the Corewell Health hospital chain voted to join the Teamsters on Nov. 15. Despite what the union called an "expensive and aggressive" union-busting campaign, more than 60% voted "yes." In the Los Angeles suburb of Torrance, about 600 hospital workers filed a petition on Nov. 1 to join the National Union of Healthcare Workers. At the University of California, 5,000 student employees and researchers filed a petition to join United Auto Workers Local 4811 on Nov. 8. At Saint Louis University, 500-odd graduate-student workers voted overwhelmingly to join the UAW on Nov. 14, and more than 2,500 teaching and research assistants at Penn State announced on Nov. 11 they had signed UAW union cards. At George Washington University in Washington, graduate workers voted 347-2 to join SEIU Local 500 on Nov. 13.

RED STATE VOTERS BACK HIGHER MINIMUM WAGE, PAID SICK LEAVE

Several states that voted heavily for Donald Trump approved ballot initiatives to raise their minimum wage and to let workers earn paid sick leave. In Missouri voters solidly approved increasing their miminum wage from $12.30 to $15 in 2026, while Alaskans endorsed raising theirs from $11.73 to $15 in July 2027, and Arizona rejected reducing the minimum wage for tipped workers. Ironically, California narrowly nixed moving its minimum up to $18. Alaska, Missouri and Nebraska also voted to require employers to provide one hour of paid sick leave for every 30 hours worked for up to seven days per year. Three states enlarged union rights. The Alaska initiative also bans "captive-audience meetings," and Oregon voted to require cannabis businesses not to interfere with union organizing.

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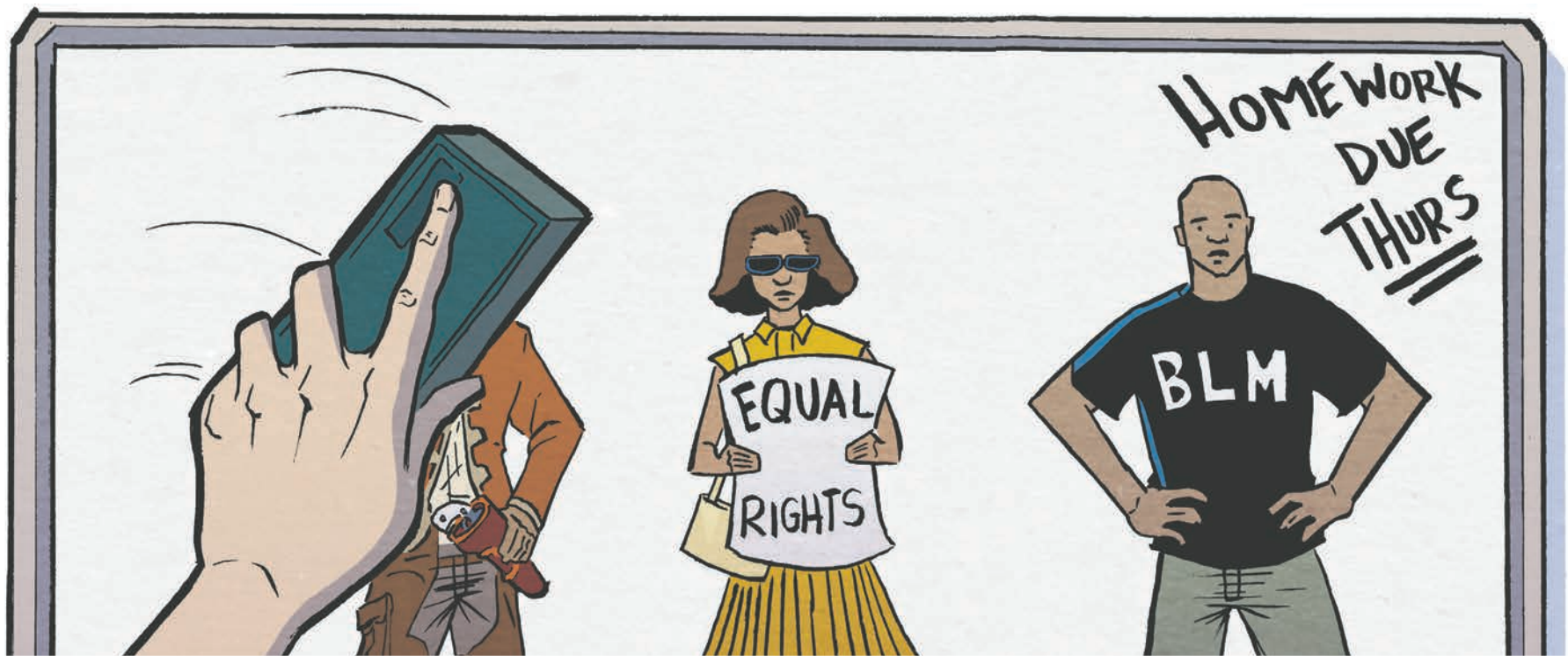

FRANK REYNOSO

By Linda Martín Alcoff

The day after the defeat of Kamala Harris' historic candidacy, I heard a colleague assert, over the drinks we were sharing at a mid-afternoon department meeting, that "identity politics is dead." He assumed Harris was put forward because of her identity as a woman and a woman of color, and that this gambit failed. The consideration of social identity in elections has long been dismissed by conservatives as "woke." Trump calls it "identitarianism," a term that in Europe refers to ethnonationalism. Yet now, even liberal *New York Times* columnists like Maureen Dowd are suggesting that identity politics alienated half the country and lost the election. Dowd says we need a "wake for woke."

The other theme of the post-election chatter is that Latino and Black men are to blame for the rise of fascism in the United States, despite the fact that massive numbers of white men and women got Trump elected.

Hmm, I don't think identity politics is dead.

However, there are certainly grounds for debate. The effort to push "diversity, equity and inclusion" (DEI) policies in every major institution has morphed into a public-relations campaign to protect institutional brands and maintain the status quo as far as possible. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor has called it a way to rebrand privilege, aiming for maximum benefits with minimal change.

Consider Harvard. With a current endowment of $53 billion and a current enrollment of only 21,000 full-time students, Harvard cannot DEI its way to legitimacy. It cannot justify itself as a private educational institution that pays no taxes and has minimal public oversight. Diversification is a cover for the structural injustice manifested in Harvard's very existence. The same is true of every private educational institution in this country.

Full disclosure, I went to Brown University for my PhD on a full fellowship. The irrational Ivy-League imprimatur no doubt played a role in my successful search in the tough job market of philosophy. But more than that, I got a good education at Brown, even in Marxist theory. Yet we don't need private institutions to get a good education.

I did learn a lot about class by attending an Ivy League school after having gone to two poorly funded public colleges in the South. I learned, for the first time, what trust funds are. Brown did not just have one library; it had five. It had ample computer support for every student, which was critically important before personal computers. And when I attended, its student population was around 6,000. I came to realize in a visceral way how class is reproduced. When I taught there as a graduate student, my students would come to class after having read *The New York Times* as well as all of their assignments. Their vocabularies were better than mine.

But these gated educational communities are not justifiable in a democracy. Brown was founded with the money of enslavers, and it took a Black president with a poor background, Ruth Simmons, to force the institution to research this history and face up to it.

However, Brown's response to this sordid past was cosmetic and minimal. They just hung a new sign on the gates, without unlocking them. When identity politics is used to put lipstick on a pig (apologies to our porcine friends), the truth shines through. No one is really fooled that we have achieved meaningful social justice when Brown wrings its hands and holds onto its money.

ORIGINS OF IDENTITY POLITICS

The concept of identity politics emerged in the 1970s from a statement written by the Combahee River Collective, a group of Black, working-class, mostly lesbian feminists. Frustrated with the limited political sensibilities in both male-dominated Black liberation groups and white-dominated radical feminist groups, they created a group where they were the majority for once. They could then set the agenda and develop a more thorough understanding of their own specific forms of structural oppression. And also develop skills of leadership and organizing without competing with others who, perhaps, had private-school educations.

Considerations of a broad range of forms of diversity — including class as well as other forms by which groups are disempowered — is good for advancing knowledge, not just disseminating it or repainting the brand. Diversifying scientific research teams, in both the natural and the social sciences, has led to significant advances in our understanding of the gender gap in wages, same-sex behavior among animals and insects, obstacles to vaccine delivery, and intergenerational wealth transfer. New questions are being asked, new hypotheses are generated and pursued, evidence from the data are assessed in new ways, and patterns can be detected that were previously missed. The results have changed medicine, biology, economics, botany, anthropology, climate science and all the STEM fields. The National Research Council has taken up DEI programs for decades to assist institutions to diversify in meaningful ways.

DEI was created by social movements and has had an impact in many sectors of society, but it has had no impact on corporate power. As my CUNY colleague Paisley Currah put it, Goldman Sachs flies the rainbow flag.

The Harris candidacy was a perfect example of this. Of course she was competent; neither identity politics nor DEI need to sacrifice competence. But corporate power needs to find people who will play their part, up to and including the continuation of genocidal wars. Harris was perfect.

The fact that her gender and ethnicity were used to discredit her and that these were the reasons some voted against her shows we need identity politics. But we need to craft a more radical version.

Ongoing educational inequity in poor communities has not been solved by diversifying the Ivies. Nor is impoverishment in general going to be addressed by DEI policies at Goldman Sachs. But if we refuse to acknowledge the way in which social identities still operate as vectors of social oppression, disregard and violence, social justice movements will fail.

And we'll jump to the conclusion that Latinos and Black men are to blame for the rise of fascism.

WHITE VOTERS

What is astounding about this charge is the way it lets the white vote off the hook. But it also indicates a refusal to engage with the white supporters of Trump, the majority who, according to exit polls, did not attend college. For many liberals, this group is considered intractable and unchangeable, incapable of reason. This has been the Democratic Party playbook for decades: Focus on people of color, on cities, on those who already self-identify as liberals. Let the white male worker go to the fascists.

Identity here, too, is playing a role, my friends. The intersection of race, class and gender — in this case white, male workers — is generating disregard and fear.

Identities affect how we experience this society and how it experiences us. These differences create different assumptions, realms of affect, judgments of credibility, trust and, sometimes, knowledge (or ignorance) about group histories. Identity cannot be left out of politics. It never has been, and it remains salient. The left has to be smarter about how it works, how it is used against social justice and how we can reclaim it. In fact, identity politics is essential.

MEDIA BLAME LEFT FOR TRUMP VICTORY

RATHER THAN THEIR OWN FEAR-BASED BUSINESS MODEL

CORPORATE MEDIA: *The CNN Election Night set in Nov. 2022.*

By Julie Hollar & Jim Naureckas

Corporate media may not have all the same goals as MAGA Republicans, but they share the same strategy: Fear works.

Appeals to fear have an advantage over other kinds of messages in that they stimulate the deeper parts of our brains, those associated with fight-or-flight responses. Fear-based messages tend to circumvent our higher reasoning faculties and demand our attention because evolution has taught our species to react strongly and quickly to things that are dangerous.

This innate human tendency has long been noted by the media industry, resulting in the old press adage, "If it bleeds, it leads." Politicians, too, are aware of this brain hack — and no one relies on evoking fear more than once-and-future President Donald Trump.

This is why coverage of issues in this election season have dovetailed so well with the Trump campaign's lines of attack against the Biden-Harris administration — even in outlets that are editorially opposed, at least ostensibly, to Trumpism.

SCARY ISSUES

Take immigration, a topic that could easily be covered as a human-interest story with profiles of people struggling to reach a better life against stark challenges. Instead, corporate media tend to report on it as a "border crisis," with a "flood" of often-faceless migrants whose very existence is treated as a threat.

This is the news business deciding that fear attracts and holds an audience better than empathy does. And that business model would be undermined by reporting that consistently acknowledged that the percentage of U.S. residents who are undocumented workers rose only slightly under the Biden administration, from 3.2% in 2019 to 3.3% in 2022 (the latest year with available data) — and is down from a peak of 4.0% in 2007, according to Pew Research Center.

With refugees treated as a scourge in centrist and right-wing media alike, is it any wonder that Trump can harvest votes by promising to do something about this menace? Eleven percent of respondents in NBC's exit poll said immigration was the single issue that mattered most in casting their vote; 90% of the voters in that group voted for Trump.

Crime is another fear-based issue that Trump hammered on in his stump speech. "Have you seen what's been happening?" he said of Washington, D.C. "Have you seen people being murdered? They come from South Carolina to go for a nice visit and they end up being murdered, shot, mugged, beat up."

Trump could make such hyperbolic claims sound credible because corporate media had paved the way with alarmist coverage of crime. It was rare to see a report that acknowledged, as a July infographic in *The New York Times* did, that crime has dropped considerably from 2020 to 2024, when it hit a four-decade low.

'CLASSIC FEAR CAMPAIGN'

Trans people, improbably enough, are another favorite subject of fear stories for media and MAGA alike. "Republicans spent nearly $215 million on network TV ads vilifying transgender people this election cycle," *Truthout* reports, with Trump spending "more money on anti-trans ads than on ads concerning housing, immigration and the economy combined."

Journalist Erin Reed described this as "a classic fear campaign:"

> *The purpose of a fear campaign is to distract you from issues that you normally care about by making you so afraid of a group of people, of somebody like me, for instance, that you're willing to throw everything else away because you're scared.*

Transphobia has been a major theme in right-wing media but has also been a prominent feature of centrist news coverage, particularly in *The New York Times*. Rather than reporting centered on trans people, which could have humanized a marginalized demographic that's unfamiliar to many readers, *The Times* chose instead to present trans youth in particular as a threat — focusing on "whether trans people are receiving too many rights, and accessing too much medical care, too quickly," as FAIR noted.

'ALIENATING VOTERS' WITH 'PROGRESSIVE AGENDA'

But rather than examining their own role in promoting the irrational fears that were the lifeblood of the successful Trump campaign, corporate media focused on their perennial electoral scapegoat: the left. *The New York Times*' editorial board quickly diagnosed the Democrats' problem (aside from sticking with Biden too long):

> *The party must also take a hard look at why it lost the election.... It took too long to recognize that large swaths of their progressive agenda were alienating voters, including some of the most loyal supporters of their party. And Democrats have struggled for three elections now to settle on a persuasive message that resonates with Americans from both parties who have lost faith in the system — which pushed skeptical voters toward the more obviously disruptive figure, even though a large majority of Americans acknowledge his serious faults. If the Democrats are to effectively oppose Mr. Trump, it must be not just through resisting his worst impulses but also by offering a vision of what they would do to improve the lives of all Americans and respond to anxieties that people have about the direction of the country and how they would change it.*

Continued on page 17

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TRUMP'S MAFIA STATE EMERGES

GAGE SKIDMORE

HE'S BACK: *Donald Trump speaks at a campaign rally in Phoenix, Arizona.*

By John Tarleton

Matt Gaetz was a congressman under investigation by the House Ethics Committee for sex trafficking minors who Donald Trump nominated to be Attorney General, the nation's top law enforcement official. He was best known to his peers for showing off photos from his sex parties on the floor of the House.

Pete Hegseth is a weekend host on Fox & Friends with white-nationalist tattoos. He is Trump's nominee to head the Department of Defense, which has an annual budget of more than $800 billion per year.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., is the world's most prominent vaccine critic. He also believes COVID-19 was engineered to spare the Chinese and Ashkenazi Jews and harm Blacks and whites. He has been chosen to lead the sprawling Department of Health and Human Services.

Gaetz, Hegseth and Kennedy were just three of Donald Trump's early jaw-dropping Cabinet picks. Gaetz's candidacy flamed out eight days later, when even the normally supine Republican Senate caucus signaled it would never confirm him. In Pam Bondi, a former Florida attorney general who served on Trump's legal team during his first impeachment trial, Trump found a replacement without Gaetz's baggage but who is likely to be equally pliable.

Meanwhile, the crackpot Cabinet picks keep coming. Linda McMahon, the former CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment will lead the Department of Education. Sean Duffy, another Fox News personality and former aviation-industry lobbyist, will lead the Department of Transportation. Trump's battle against rising prices apparently won't apply to beleaguered airline passengers.

And then there's Elon Musk, the world's richest man, and fellow billionaire Vivek Ramaswamy, who will co-chair the non-existent Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). While the DOGE isn't real, Musk's power within the Trump administration is. He sits in on most of Trump's meetings. The task Musk has given himself is to cut $2 trillion per year from an annual federal budget of $6 trillion by mid 2026. His goal: to replicate what he did at Twitter (now known as X) when he bought the company, immediately firing 75% of the workforce and ultimately destroying much of the company's value.

Is there a method to all this Trumpian madness? Musk and RFK Jr. were key supporters of Trump's campaign, and Trump is sharing the spoils of victory with them, a practice as old as politics. Characters like Hegseth and Duffy who come straight out of the Fox studios are in keeping with Trump's penchant for hiring underlings who he thinks look good on television.

Beyond that, there's a deep contempt not only for expertise but for any notion of public service. Many Trump voters were outraged by the price of eggs. Now the arsonists they have empowered are ready to burn it all down, just as they always said they would.

BREAKING THE PENTAGON & THE DOJ

Trump's picks for the Pentagon and the Department of Justice bear special scrutiny. These were two establishment pillars that thwarted Trump's desire to rule by fiat during his first term. With Bondi and another Trump personal lawyer Todd Blanche in DOJ top spots, personal loyalty to the president shouldn't be a problem. The nominee for solicitor general, the number three person at the Justice Department, is D. John Sauer, the lawyer who successfully argued before the Supreme Court earlier this year in Trump's presidential immunity case that a president has the power to assassinate a political rival if they do it as an "official act."

In 2020 the top military brass balked at being sent into major cities to suppress protesters under the 1807 Insurrection Act. Hegseth supports setting up "warrior councils" made up of hand-picked retired three- and four-star generals and admirals. They in turn would designate military leaders who should be removed for being too "woke" and replace them with those who are sufficiently "anti-woke" and loyal to Trump. This would make it much easier to turn the military into a domestic-policing arm of the Trump administration.

For MAGA acolytes, the long march through the institutions will include an all-out attack on colleges and universities, which are seen as bastions of left-wing radicalism. Tools they are preparing to use include turning the college accreditation system on its head as well as spurious charges of anti-semitism. Also being targeted are the nerdy scientists at the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Institutes for Health (a key source of vaccine-related medical research) and anywhere else inhabited by "deep-state" bureaucrats wedded to fact-based evidence.

For every big-name appointee Trump makes, there will be many more mid-level political appointees who will be recruited to carry out these purges. The second Trump administration will also seek to reverse late-19th-century reforms that created a professional civil service that carries out basic governmental tasks on a non-partisan basis. Before that, under the "spoils system", most federal government jobs went to loyalists from the winning presidential candidate's party. It could happen again.

Trump, the absurd former reality TV star, has proven what Upton Sinclair, author of the dystopian 1936 novel It Can't Happen Here, argued. If fascism came here, it would have distinctly American characteristics and would not look the same as in Nazi Germany or Mussolini's Italy. Still, it's worth thinking about historic parallels.

~ COMPARISONS ~

The sacking of established institutions by ideological zealots, if it comes to pass, brings to mind Mao's Red Guards at the height of the Cultural Revolution. Trump's harangues about "the enemies of the people" adds a touch of Stalin.

Leftist writer Carl Davidson notes that Americans are getting a crash course in the cult of personality around Trump that proclaims his infallibility. Drawing on a concept from Nazi Germany, Davidson describes Trump as "the head teacher of the Fuhrerprinzip, the 'Leader Principle.'"

Trump has never been shy about his admiration for autocrats like China's Xi Jinping, Russia's Vladimir Putin or North Korea's Kim Jong-Un. Trump and the larger conservative movement have also been drawn to Viktor Orban, the Hungarian autocrat who has maintained a semblance of a formal democracy while consolidating power over big business, the media and the judiciary — to the point that it's become impossible to defeat Orban and his party in an election.

Or is Trump more of an American Silvio Berlusconni, the Italian media tycoon who, starting in the 1990s, was elected prime minister several times? He dominated Italian politics with his outsized personality but was too dissolute to radically change the country's established political system.

Another way of looking at Trump, who came of age in New York City 50 years ago, is as someone looking to run the country like a mafia boss for whom corruption is the point and to that end wields absolute power, dispenses favors as he sees fit, brooks no opposition, and will ruthlessly target anyone who crosses him.

Trump has always been much better at getting attention than actually running anything. So it remains to be seen if his administration can consolidate an authoritarian mafia state. And whether progressive forces in this country can regain the initiative against Trump and his cronies.

While there is still time.

LABOR'S RESURGENCE CAN CONTINUE DESPITE TRUMP

LAURA BRETT

ROLL THE UNION ON: *Unionizing Starbucks baristas march for their rights in December 2022.*

By Chris Bohner & Eric Blanc

Does Trump's re-election mean that the U.S. labor resurgence is over? Not necessarily.

It's true that the new administration is preparing major attacks against workers and the labor movement. And many union leaders will assume that the most we can hope for over the next four years is to survive through purely defensive struggles.

But unions are actually still well-positioned to continue their organizing and bargaining momentum. Here are eight positive factors that should ward off despair — and that should encourage unions to invest more, not less, into organizing the unorganized:

~ 1 ~

The economic forces fueling Trumpism also favor labor's continued resurgence. After the pandemic laid bare the fundamental unfairness of our economic system, workers responded with a burst of union organizing and the most significant strike activity in decades. The same underlying economic forces — chronic economic insecurity and inequality — helped propel Trumpism to victory in the 2024 elections. But Trump's actual policies will inevitably exacerbate economic inequality, undermining the Republican Party's hollow pro-worker rhetoric.

Stepping into the breach of Trump's fake populism, unions remain workers' best tool to provide a real solution to economic insecurity. And projected low unemployment will continue to provide a fertile economic environment for new organizing. As long as we remain in a tight labor market, employers will have less power to threaten employees who dare to unionize their workplaces, and workers will have more bargaining leverage against employers, increasing the chances of successful — and headline-grabbing — strikes.

~ 2 ~

Unions can still grow under Republican administrations. It's certainly true that the organizing terrain will be significantly harder under Trump and a hostile National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). But it's still possible to fight and win even in these conditions.

It's worth remembering that U.S. labor's current uptick began with the statewide teachers' strikes that swept across red states in 2018 during Trump's first term. And NLRB data shows that putting major resources into new organizing can go a long way towards counter-balancing the negative impact of an adverse political context.

Unions organized significantly more workers under George W. Bush's administration than under Barack Obama's. Why? The main reason is that the labor movement in the early 2000s was still in the midst of a relatively well-resourced push to organize the unorganized, whereas by the time Obama took office, labor had mostly thrown in the towel on external organizing, hoping instead to be saved from above by lobbying establishment Democrats to pass national labor law reform. Labor can grow over the coming years if it starts putting serious resources towards this goal.

~ 3 ~

Labor has huge financial assets at its disposal. According to the latest data from the Department of Labor, unions hold $42 billion in financial assets and only $6.4 billion in debt. These assets — the vast majority of which are liquid assets — can help defend against the coming political attack and be deployed in aggressive organizing drives and strikes. Unions have the financial cushion to go on the offensive while simultaneously defending themselves from regulatory and legislative attacks.

~ 4 ~

Unions remain popular and trusted. According to a September 2024 Gallup poll, 70% of Americans approve of labor unions, the highest support since the 1950s — even 49% of Republicans these days support unions. Overall, Americans trust organized labor far more than the president, Congress, big business and the media.

When workers have the opportunity to vote for a union at their workplace, unions win 77% of those elections. The American public also supports strikes. According to a poll by YouGov in August, 55% of Americans believe that going on strike is an effective strategy for workers to get what they want from management, compared to 23% who say it is not. Similarly, 50% of Americans believe it is unacceptable to scab, while only 26% say it is acceptable. Strong public support for labor continues to provide fertile ground for a union advance.

~ 5 ~

Organized labor is reforming. The bad news: Most union officials remain risk-averse, and their failure to seriously pivot towards organizing new members — despite exceptionally favorable conditions since 2020 — helped pave the way for Trump's inroads among working people. The good news: The "troublemakers" wing of the labor movement is larger than ever, as seen in the

Continued on page 18

10 REASONS TO JOIN A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

1 YOU GET TO ACTUALLY BE AROUND PEOPLE
We spend too much time alone these days. Get involved with a group of people that holds regular meetings and events!

2 MAKE FRIENDS THAT ARE POLITICALLY ALIGNED WITH YOU
It's great to know people with whom you can share your radical ideas; hopefully you can challenge each other, stimulating new ways of thinking. These kinds of conversations can also provide a healthy emotional outlet for all the horrific news we intake.

3 POLITICAL EDUCATION
Expand your political, historical, societal, economic understanding. Comrades will often share readings and other types of media; some groups even specifically offer political education. And learn from the actions you organize! Challenging the system is a great way to learn how power structures work.

4 WORK TOGETHER
Collective decision making is a big part of being in an organizing group. Learn how to put your heads together to best make effective plans. And how to work in coalition with other organizations. Having a network of organized groups collaborating with each other helps popular movements grow and succeed.

5 SATISFACTION OF GETTING THINGS DONE
Protests, direct actions, strikes, canvassing and know-your-rights campaigns, creating media, etc. An effective political organization has many things going on at once. See the fruits of your labor.

6 DIRECTLY SUPPORT AND EMPOWER FELLOW COMMUNITY MEMBERS
Getting involved in political organizations often gives you the opportunity to engage more deeply in the communities they are rooted in or involved with.

7 CREATE PEOPLE-POWER INFRASTRUCTURE
Protests come and go but strengthening organizations now will make it easier to channel the energies unleashed by future moments of political unrest.

8 2028 GENERAL STRIKE
The United Auto Workers put out a call earlier this year for other unions to align their contracts to expire on May 1, 2028 so they can strike in unison. For a 2028 mass strike to succeed, it will be imperative for political organizations to support labor unions. Start planning now.

9 YOU JUST MIGHT CHANGE THINGS
The only way to stop Trump or implement leftism is through building mass movements. By getting organized, you can become part of the solution.

10 AND IF THIS WORLD GOES DOWN IN A FLAMING WRECK...
Better together. Even if you think there's no chance political organizing will change the path of destruction most world leaders are on, I find more meaning in life when I challenge the system rather than capitulate to it.

– AMBA GUERGUERIAN

IMMIGRANTS ON ALERT

BUT TOP NEW YORK DEMS SHOW NO SENSE OF URGENCY

REED DUNLEA

THE FACE OF NEW YORK: *Some of the immigrant New Yorkers who participated in a rally at Foley Square in Lower Manhattan two nights after Donald Trump's re-election.*

By Ariana Orozco

As election returns started to roll in on Nov. 5, dozens of immigrant-rights activists gathered in a high-rise building near Midtown for a watch party. People chattered and watched with hopeful anticipation as the television analysts explained the brightly lit election map. Everyone in the room understood that the next four years would present new obstacles for migrants and their allies, but they expected that Kamala Harris' victory would provide an easier situation for organizing than the alternative. But by the time the party ended at 9 p.m., people's anticipation was melting into nervousness. The next day, these organizers would have to contend with a much more grim reality — Donald Trump would return to the presidency, more ferocious than ever.

"Together, we will fight the fascist President-elect and his racist deportation agenda every step of the way," tweeted Murad Awawdeh, CEO of the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC).

Trump's first term was marked by both vitriolic language and hostile policies directed at immigrants. His "Remain in Mexico" policy and Muslim ban put millions of asylum seekers at risk. Now Trump has promised to mobilize the military to conduct mass deportations of the "20 million" undocumented people living in the country. (Most estimates put the actual number of undocumented immigrants at 11 million, but this bloated figure will allow Trump to craft the narrative of a nation under attack from the mothers and babies who sell candies on the subway.)

While it remains to be seen if Trump will fulfill his campaign promises, organizers are already preparing for the worst, Awadeh said. In an interview with *The Indypendent*, he explained that NYIC, which is made up of 200 immigrant-rights groups from across New York State, is prepared for Trump to bend and break the law at his will: "We knew the Muslim ban was illegal, but he still did it. So, it's about taking him at his word and mapping out our strategy accordingly." While Awawdeh recognizes the need for on-the-fly organizing, organizers also know that chaos is Trump's strategy and that before he gets into office, it is critical to establish safeguards for migrants.

WHAT NYC & NY STATE ARE DOING

In New York City, advocates are hopeful that they can enshrine more protections for immigrants before Trump takes office on Jan. 20. On Nov. 18, Mayor Eric Adams announced a new policy that will allow migrant families with children in kindergarten through sixth grade to remain in the shelter system during the school year. This policy, supported by NYIC, will ensure that children do not have to switch schools in the middle of the school year, offering stability for people in dangerously precarious situations.

On the state level, organizers have confronted a lack of urgency from the most powerful Democrats in New York. Speaking to a group of business leaders in Manhattan on Nov. 19, State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said the legislature was "unlikely" to convene a special session to expedite policy proposals that could further protect vulnerable groups. Gov. Hochul and Attorney General Letitia James have told advocates they will closely monitor events but have offered nothing else. This response stands in stark contrast to California, another large blue state, where Democrats control the governorship and hold large majorities in both houses of the legislature.

There, Gov. Gavin Newsom called on Nov. 7 for a special legislative session. While the specific priorities of this session have not been made clear, Newsom says he wants to cement California protections for civil and human rights.

Here in New York, advocacy groups have rallied around measures that will prohibit law enforcement agencies from collaborating with Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE), a federal agency. While many on the right have planted seeds of fear about immigrants, self-declared sanctuary cities have shown no increase in crime due to an influx of migrants, and many sanctuary cities actually have lower homicide and assault rates than the national average, according to *New York Focus*. Yet without restrictions, any minor infraction could trigger ICE to rip family members away from each other, separating children and parents across international borders.

THE COPS & THE FEDS

There is already precedent for police and ICE to work together. In 2018, the sheriff in Rensselaer County, near Albany, signed a memorandum that deputizes employees to identify deportable people and report them to ICE. The Immigrant Defense Project has emphasized the cruelty of ICE tactics and argued that through supporting the bill, Gov. Hochul would be fulfilling her role as governor to "build trust between our state government and the community it serves." Gov. Hochul has not yet commented on the legislation.

Hochul first made a name for herself in New York politics in 2007 when as Eric County clerk she defied an executive order from Gov. Eliot Spitzer, threatening to have undocumented immigrants who applied for driver's licenses arrested. She later rode that notoriety to a Buffalo-area congressional seat before being tapped to be Andrew Cuomo's lieutenant governor.

Groups that advocate for migrant laborers also have cause for concern. In 2023 the Department of Homeland Security and the New York State Department of Consumer and Worker Protection issued new rules deferring legal action against immigrants whose wage-theft claims are being adjudicated. The New York State Workers' Compensation Board released a statement pledging its commitment to "work with noncitizen workers (including undocumented workers) and their advocates to gain temporary protection from prosecution and potential deportation, as well as the ability to work legally in the U.S." While this seems encouraging, as Awawdeh notes, Donald Trump does not care about the law. Filing for wage-theft and worker-compensation protections must be pursued cautiously, as this requires immigrants to out themselves in an atmosphere where no protection can be guaranteed.

New York has some immigrant-friendly laws on the state and city level, but there is also certainty of a federal crackdown — making it is difficult to estimate what happens next. Will Donald Trump really mobilize the military against refugees, families and children? Will Gov. Hochul strengthen the state's protections for immigrants? Can any department in the federal government slow Trump's promised rampage? Regardless of what transpires in 2025 and beyond, organizers know they have each other. "We've been building power for 37 years," Awawdeh stated. "We did not stop when [Trump] left office, and, no matter what, we will not stop now."

MAKING A LIVING ON ROOSEVELT AVE

IMMIGRANT SEX WORKERS DODGE INCREASED POLICE PRESENCE

RICHARD SWAFFORD

CRIMINALIZATION: *Sex workers on Roosevelt Avenue in Jackson Heights, Queens have retreated into the shadows amid a police crackdown.*

By Tanya Raghu

Camilla, 26, reapplied a coat of clear lip gloss, a gesture not only of seduction but nervousness, while pacing around the 94th Street corner along Roosevelt Avenue, where the NYPD has recently stepped up its presence since Mayor Eric Adams announced Operation Restore Roosevelt on Oct. 15 to address alleged public-safety and quality-of-life concerns.

The 90-day targeted operation aims to address unlicensed street vendors, prostitution and shoplifting in Jackson Heights, East Elmhurst and Corona along a nearly two-mile stretch from 74th Street to 111th Street through the deployment of hundreds of city police officers and state troopers.

The NYPD is running the 15-agency operation that includes the FDNY, MTA, Parks, Department of Buildings, Department of Sanitation, Department of Transportation, Queens DA, Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, and the New York State Police.

Many sex workers and activist organizations argue the measures risk over-policing and targeting the community's most vulnerable members, including street vendors, sex workers and undocumented people.

"We already know the police racially [profile] for, you know, all ranges of issues," says Samantha Majic, an associate professor of political science at John Jay College, where her research focuses on the politics surrounding sex work. "So why wouldn't it be the same for sex work?"

Though she fears getting arrested, Camilla said she turned to sex work through a friend in a desperate bid to earn money while awaiting her work-authorization documents. Camilla arrived in New York City from Venezuela around a year ago and lives in a Bronx migrant shelter with her husband and six-year-old son.

"I just run away to wherever and hide on another street," Camilla told *The Indypendent*. "I wait for the police to leave, then come out again."

On Oct. 6, the Let's Improve Roosevelt Ave Coalition held a well-attended rally led by Hiram Monserrate — a former cop-turned-state senator who was expelled from the legislature in 2009 after being convicted of domestic-violence assault for slashing his girlfriend in the face. The coalition's demands included a larger police presence, crackdown on organized crime groups and more anti-human trafficking efforts.

One of the protesters, Rosario Colladio, who has lived in Jackson Heights for 40 years, said she feels uncomfortable by the presence of female sex workers along Roosevelt Avenue and hopes to move out of the neighborhood.

"I used to go to the Yankees Stadium," Colladio said. "I come back here at one o'clock, and I'm not scared, nobody bothered me, but now I don't go anymore to the Yankees Stadium because I'm scared to walk on Roosevelt Avenue."

Illeana Vega is a member of the Latin/African American Chaplain Association, a religious organization that serves as an intermediary between trafficking victims and law enforcement. She was at the rally and said there was a noticeably higher number of sex workers in the neighborhood.

"It's more visible now, which is pretty alarming that it's not hidden," Vega said. "There's also been an increase with the migrant situation; many are coming in and have a [coyote] debt to pay back, at least $50,000 each to pay back their traffickers, so they are sold straight into sex trafficking, which is a huge commodity."

Meredith Dank, director of the Human Exploitation and Resilience program at New York University, said that most individuals along Roosevelt Avenue are engaging in sex work for voluntary reasons but are often assumed to be there due to trafficking or coercion.

"There's a push to try to show evidence of sex trafficking, and when there isn't, it's a very different reaction towards the individuals," Dank said.

Ariella Moscowitz is the director of communications for Decriminalizing Sex Work, a nationwide nonprofit that advocates for legalization. "When there might be a proliferation of consensual, adult sex workplaces, the immediate go-to for people who don't like that, for whatever reason, is to assume that exploitation and trafficking is taking place," Moscowitz said. "There is more police involvement and all these issues that further this cycle of violence."

Many advocacy groups including immigration-justice group Make the Road New York, one of the largest in the neighborhood, say the City and State's action "is both an overblown and potentially dangerous response," in an Oct. 23 press release.

Sex workers and activists at an Oct. 22 Make the Road rally said the issue is not as dire as the mayor and others that are pro-Operation Roosevelt Ave claim it to be, and that the policing will target sex workers and immigrants in the community just trying to make ends meet.

"Operation Restore Roosevelt is a horrible policing campaign that has escalated policing and indiscriminately targeted some of the most vulnerable members of our community," said Make the Road activist Maxima Rodas. "This so-called quality of life operation targets sex workers, street vendors and migrant communities who live in this neighborhood. This is a racist and anti-immigrant attack [on] our communities."

Only 15% of sex clients are non-white, but they are far more likely to be arrested, according to data from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services. A 2020 *ProPublica* investigation showed that the vast majority of customers are white, but the NYPD arrested three times as many alleged patrons in Black and Latino neighborhoods.

Nicole Teyuca, a program coordinator at Translatinx Network, a national nonprofit that supports trans communities, previously engaged in sex work when she arrived in New York City from Mexico in the 1980s. At the time, stop-and-frisk policies under former mayor Rudy Guliani allowed police officers to detain and search people under dubious pretexts.

"They didn't ask you for your pronouns; they called you 'sir,'" Teyuca said. "Sometimes they wanted you to remove your wig and undress you; that period of time had a lot of transphobia and intolerance."

For many sex workers, the policing operation today is another layer in the harassment they have historically faced.

"I've been a victim of violence, and so have many of my sisters," Mariana Bermudez, a trans Latina sex worker with clients in Jackson Heights, said. "The only way to live in peace and calmness is to legalize sex work."

MEXICO & THE PATH NOT TAKEN

WHILE THE U.S. DESCENDS INTO TRUMPISM, MEXICO'S LEFT POPULIST GOVERNMENT HAS FLOURISHED SINCE 2018

FERNANDO LLANO

DYNAMIC DUO: *Claudia Sheinbaum became Mexico's first female president in October, taking the mantle from fellow leftist Andrés Manuel López Obrador who served from 2018–2024.*

By Ariana Orozco

As Donald Trump's second term looms ahead, the wannabe dictator's rise to political prominence is under particular scrutiny. While the question in 2016 was how he did it, 2024 boasts a much more complex question: How could Americans do this? Donald Trump's supporters are no longer only fringe racists and Christian-nationalists. He has created the multiracial coalition of working-class voters that Democrats have been trying to assemble for years. His supporters include middle-class crypto bros, apathetic teenagers, and a rising number of Black and Latino voters angry at... too many things to list.

While the United States flounders towards the far-right, our southern neighbor faced a similar crossroads in 2018 and has found itself in an era marked by policies only Bernie Sanders has ever proposed on a national stage.

After two failed runs for president, leftist politician Andrés Manuel López Obredor created his own left populist party, Morena, and ran in 2018 against all three of Mexico's main neoliberal parties, winning by more than 20 points over his closest challenger. López Obredor (who is commonly known by his initials, AMLO) had previously been the standard bearer for one of those three parties, the PRD, but he repudiated it for shutting down leftist ideas in favor of a neoliberal agenda that increasingly alienated the working class. Sound familiar?

Reflecting on 2016, it is now clear that the U.S. public was ready to toss aside its own self-serving political establishment. Two political figures met the moment: Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump. They built their campaigns on indignation against elites. But where Sanders geared his rage against the billionaire class, Trump stoked fears of immigrants and other marginalized groups. Who knows if Sanders would have won against Trump. What is certain, though, is that when the Democratic establishment and corporate-media machine undercut Sanders' campaign in favor of Hilary Clinton, they sealed our fate.

Meanwhile, Mexicans chose the left, and López Obredor and his successor, the recently elected Claudia Sheinbaum, have been introducing sweeping reforms to address corruption, inequality and violence. He led the largest decrease in poverty in 20 years through doubling the country's minimum wage and tripling it in areas close to the U.S. border, where living costs are significantly higher. López Obredor left office with sky-high approval ratings, and Sheinbaum, a former climate scientist and Mexico City mayor, was elected Mexico's first woman president. She ran on a similar platform to López Obredor, promising to continue to address public-safety concerns through social programs like education and poverty alleviation.

However, Sheinbaum is facing an uncertain future as Trump's second term nears. The greatest threat is Trump's promise to impose tariffs as punishment for the millions of migrants who travel through Mexico before reaching the United States' southern border. López Obredor was able to appease Trump's fetish for punishing immigrants through agreeing to the controversial "Remain in Mexico" policy and maintaining a friendly working relationship with the United States. The policy required certain asylum seekers to stay in Mexico while waiting for their asylum hearings in the United States. Joe Biden revoked the mandate in 2021 after abuses were reported as endemic to the system. López Obrador carried on a similar relationship with Joe Biden, friendly, but strained.

Sheinbaum has inherited López Obrador's complex relationships with U.S. presidents along with the pressures of establishing her own while fulfilling the promises she's made to continue investing in the projects López Obrador started. While it will undoubtedly be a tricky path, Sheinbaum has made it clear she is not afraid of Donald Trump.

While mainstream news outlets have reported on the dire reliance of Mexico on the U.S. economy, López Obrador and Sheinbaum have rarely reacted as if Mexico could only be the United States' helpless victim. Much like Sanders, Mexico's leftist leaders have been pugnacious defenders of their socialist ideologies. They have proven they are willing to defy the United States if they are at odds over domestic concerns. In August, Mexicans voted for widespread judicial reform that allows the general public to elect Mexico's Supreme Court justices and other federal judges in place of the appointment system — something progressives in the United States could only dream of.

The sweeping legislation will address the pervasive corruption in the Mexican judiciary system. As expected, it has ruffled the feathers of international corporations that rely on corrupt judges for tax breaks and labor loopholes. U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar warned the reform is "a potential risk to the U.S.-Mexico trade relationship." López Obrador, in turn, temporarily froze relations with the U.S. embassy and retorted, "Read our Constitution." Sheinbaum has similarly responded that Mexico is a "sovereign" nation when questioned about how she will react to Trump.

Behind these quips is the dawning reality that gone are the days of Mexican leaders accepting subtle condescension or the myth that Mexico does not hold major political power — through its crude oil, agricultural centers, and factories that contribute billions to the U.S. economy. It is also the United States' largest trading partner.

Of course it would be idealistic to assume the United States and Trump do not have the upper hand. It would also be dishonest to pretend the Mexican government is beyond reproach: It greenlights infrastructure projects that destroy indigenous lands and has been unable to muster a strong response to a growing number of murders and disappearances of women, many of whom work in the export factories that are so essential to the Mexican economy. Yet the nation's pivot towards a more humane state reveals that a country's rage does not have to be weaponized to divide and conquer. Had our elected officials chosen us, too, our rage could have been used to reroute this country towards the kind of generous social democracy that Western European nations have enjoyed for decades — instead of the limp fight between battered liberal democracy and vicious fascism we are forced to engage in.

INSIDE A GAZA CAMP

GOFUNDME DONATIONS SEEDED THIS (RELATIVELY) SAFE HAVEN

THE SAMEER PROJECT

REFUGE: *Another day at the Refaat Alareer Camp in Deir al-Balah, Gaza.*

By Amba Guerguerian

When Israel was founded in 1948, at least 750,000 Palestinians were expelled from their soon-to-be erased towns and villages. Many of those fleeing the Nakba who lived in what is now southern "Israel" ended up in the Gaza Strip. They settled in refugee camps that eventually became towns and small cities. Since Israel's genocide began in October 2023, Gaza has been mostly obliterated. Amid the ruins, internal displacement camps have formed, often with hundreds of tents and dire conditions. Theft and violence is common at some camps, say people familiar with the situation.

"People are starving," says Hala, explaining the tension at many camps. Hala is one of the founders of The Sameer Project, a grassroots aid group that works on the ground in Gaza and founded the Refaat Alareer camp in Deir al-Balah, which has become a relatively safe place for some of Gaza's most severely ill and injured residents.

The Refaat Alareer camp hosts 22 tents and around 120 people including staff. It has grown since it started with three or four families and hopes to continue to. It provides clean water to its residents and has a strong security system with five hired guards. There is a medical station where nurses are always available. The camp has internet service and offers classes to children five days a week, including one art day. There are volleyball courts. And trainings that meet a variety of needs. A gynecologist gave an information session; someone came and held a lesson on breathing techniques; there have been bomb-response trainings for children.

Camp residents spend time going to the clinic, attending various organized events and school, socializing with each other, and cooking. There are small fireplaces scattered around the camp so each family can cook. The Sameer Project gives people a weekly allowance "so they can buy some basics like a bag of rice, flour, oil."

But less and less food has been allowed into Gaza this fall. "The community kitchens around the camp all closed in the last few days due to a lack of supplies," said Hala in mid November. "Food has been a huge difficulty over the last month."

There has also been a shortage of medicine since the onset of the genocide, when Israel immediately started cutting off the regular supply of resources trucked into Gaza. But the shortage has become extreme in recent months.

"We don't have any medication," says Hala. "No aid is getting in; no trucks are getting in. … Even the larger organizations barely have enough."

According to The Sameer Project and recent news reports, even for the mere dozens of trucks per day that have been entering Gaza — an all-time low — the Palestinians there are seeing little of the aid, and when they do, it's priced very high.

"The occupation started to hire gangs to rob the trucks, put the materials in storage rooms, trickle down the aid and make sure it's priced really high." When people try to go stop the looting, quad copters come down and shoot them, Hala told *The Indypendent*. "So everyone knows that gangs and traitors are working with Zionists."

■ ■ ■

Hala is a London-based Palestinian whose parents are from Gaza. The father of her cousin Mira, who also helps run The Sameer Project, chose not to evacuate from Gaza and subsequently died there, hence the name of the group.

"When the genocide started," Hala recalled, "for the first couple of months we were focused on the survival of my mom's family members, and then a lot of them evacuated in December, so that's why I started working on mutual aid."

The Sameer Project's first efforts were focused in Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city where more than a million Gazans had taken refuge after Israel marked it a so-called "safe zone."

"We started a small group in April. We thought this was going to be like a month or two. We didn't have the expectation that the world would watch a genocide go on for over a year," Hala said, adding, "We work very closely with people on the ground. We don't consider ourselves the leaders of The Sameer Project; we consider ourselves the facilitators, but the people on the ground know what's happening."

Through family connections in Gaza, Hala learned safe tents were one of the greatest needs in Gaza. She began purchasing them on an ad-hoc basis from local vendors. The Sameer Project paid $850–$1,000 per family to cover the cost of a tent plus some cash aid and currency-exchange fees. Thanks to fundraising campaigns promoted by a popular Instagram page, Translating Palestine, whose founder is one of the members of The Sameer Project, the group raised $500,000 in May and June.

"Because we're a mutual-aid group, we're able to bypass [red] tape some NGOs have, find the best exchange places to get best exchange rates and withdrawal fees and to buy tents in bulk from merchants," said Lena Dajani, another founding member of The Sameer Project who is a Palestinian-American living in Southern California.

Groups abroad can send wire or crypto transfers to the people that run the exchange businesses. Because all the banks closed at the beginning of the war, the people who run these exchanges charge extra fees.

■ ■ ■

The Sameer Project was forced to flee Rafah in May when Israel invaded and leveled the city.

"A million people all within three days were trying to run north while they were getting bombed," Dajani told *The Indy*. "People were going to al-Mawasi and Deir al-Balah," so the group followed them.

"We noticed lots of ill and injured people were out in the streets; we saw a need for medical services, especially for adults who aren't served by NGOs," said Dajani. The group put together a team of doctors and opened what it initially planned to be a camp for expectant mothers, but the doctors couldn't ignore all the people with other medical needs they were encountering: "People that needed war injuries changed, patients that were awaiting evacuation and would be discharged from the hospital" with nowhere to go. "Now we only serve the most vulnerable medical cases," said Lena.

"The Refaat Alareer camp is not in any way a benchmark of how camps are" generally in Gaza, says Hala. The camp is small, with most others averaging 200–300 tents, she says.

There are some camps run by aid groups, like the Palestinian Red Crescent, that have access to clean water. "Other camps are like slums," says Hala, "random sporadic tents set up next to each other." Usually a group of people from those camps creates a leadership committee, and the camps each have a small medical station where a doctor volunteers.

The Sameer Project recently started communicating with a point person from around ten high-need camps so it can start to provide them with aid like food, water trucks that will last a few days, tarps, blankets, cleaning supplies and adult diapers.

AUDRE LORDE, REIMAGINED

Survival Is a Promise: The Eternal Life of Audre Lorde
BY ALEXIS PAULINE GUMBS
PENGUIN BOOKS, AUGUST 2024, 528 PAGES

By Jessica Max Stein

Survival Is a Promise: The Eternal Life of Audre Lorde by Alexis Pauline Gumbs is not a biography. Well, it's not only a biography. This may disappoint readers who, like me, were excited to hear about this hefty tome touted as the first new biography in 20 years of the legendary "Black lesbian feminist poet warrior mother," as Lorde liked to identify herself.

Rather than straightforwardly telling Lorde's life story, Gumbs instead riffs on many of its major elements: places, people, movements and literary motifs. Each short chapter meditates on an aspect of Lorde's life, employing an extended metaphor and/or series of images (often from Lorde's writing) to expand or expound upon that aspect. Gumbs also throws popular science, progressive political treatise and her own musings into the mix. Surprisingly, this multifaceted approach not only works but at times achieves a gorgeous lyricism and transcendence, more like poetry than biography.

Gumbs isn't the first to employ such an approach; deconstructing biography is having a moment. Imani Perry's recent *Looking for Lorraine: The Radiant and Radical Life of Lorraine Hansberry* creatively reconsiders the details of the playwright's life. Similarly, Amelia Possanza's *Lesbian Love Story: A Memoir in Archives* chronicles the author's reactions to her archival discoveries; it's as much about her as about her historical subjects.

I admire this approach's bold opposition to the supposed "objectivity" of typical biography. These writers are openly subjective, veritable characters in their own books. And if the personal is political, then why not inscribe yourself in your writing? Why not frankly discuss who you are and how this shapes your interpretation of the biographical material you are presenting? Gumbs nods to queer Black Canadian writer Dionne Brand's "disrupt[ing] the idea of the autobiography" and by implication, the biography: Each narrative is just one possible version of how the story could have been told. Eschewing typical chronology and structure only highlights this for the reader.

Gumbs discusses a lecture in which Brand considers the traditional British literature she grew up imbibing. "Her experience of reading as she offers it back to the world here is not just about how these books impacted her," Gumbs writes. "It is about what it is possible to write, say, understand, know, and be in a world shaped by the narratives of colonialism." At its best, this writing approach is downright revolutionary.

At its worst, it's an alienating read. The loose chronology, while creative, can be confusing. It's not always clear why Gumbs employs a certain metaphor or image, or how it relates to the aspect of Lorde's life under discussion. For example, Gumbs vividly sketches Lorde's "big sister" dynamic with fellow Black lesbian poet Pat Parker, noticing how Lorde was the only person who could get away with calling this tough butch a breezy nickname like "Patty," but why does she compare their friendship to "abyssal plains" at the bottom of the ocean? Similarly, another chapter bewilderingly begins, "I don't know if Audre Lorde ever heard recordings of gray whale speech. ... The belches, the deep croaks." While Lorde used this metaphor to describe a woman speaking in her poem "Berlin Is Hard on Colored Girls," Gumbs' experimental extension of it diverts from, rather than complements, her discussion of Lorde's mentorship to Afro-German women.

But most of the metaphors work. Gumbs beautifully likens the healing power of Black female friendship to trees in a forest helping each other process light and feeding each other needed nutrients in a "black-feminist photosynthesis." Gumbs riffs originally on the shared history of the typewriter and the gun, and describes AIDS with a sharp eye, calling T-cells "warrior poets of the blood." I teared up when she used Lorde's recurring motif of light to describe the deaths of Lorde and her fellow poet Joe Beam: "Joe and Audre became pure light."

Despite its poetic approach, the book does offer some new biographical nuggets, as Gumbs had unprecedented access to Lorde's manuscript archives. Gumbs heartbreakingly meditates on the death of Lorde's teen friend Genevieve and Lorde's subsequent lifelong grief, deftly pointing out both the factual fictions and the deeper truths in Lorde's "biomythography" *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. She writes insightfully about Lorde's falling out with fellow Black queer poet luminary June Jordan, situating their dispute in their shared lineage to the writers and activists that came after: "Many of us are cousins related through these two sisters." A more traditional biography wouldn't allow this rhetorical move.

Ultimately, Lorde comes alive in the book, an affectionate and multi-faceted portrait. The metaphors, many based in nature, root Lorde in the earth and the greater cosmos, inscribing her into the pantheon of ancestors. At its most shining moments, the book is refreshingly, joyfully creative, embodied and alive.

Gumbs best describes her approach in the book's last chapter, which consists of descriptions of photographs taken by Lorde of her adopted home of St. Croix after 1989's Hurricane Hugo. Though these are photos of objects and landscapes, not of people and certainly not of Lorde herself, Gumbs writes, "I call these photographs self-portraits because, as Lorde says, observing the damage was like 'looking in a mirror.'" This is a lovely way of underscoring Lorde's pain at her home's devastation — at the same time as cancer ravaged her own body; a wonderful way of emphasizing the interconnectedness of not just living beings but the natural world.

Indeed, this is exactly what Gumbs is trying to achieve. She continues: "And the refraction of the self-portrait spills onto me, spills onto us, because the artist, the self that the portrait invokes, already considers herself intersubjective."

Intersubjective: This book isn't merely about Lorde, it is about Gumbs. And it is about you, the reader. The book opens with an epigraph of an audience member at a poetry reading asking Lorde whom she meant when she wrote, in her most famous poem, "We were never meant to survive."

Lorde replied: "I was talking about you."

Jessica Max Stein is a former editorial collective member of The Indypendent. *She is the author of* Funny Boy: The Richard Hunt Biography *(Rutgers University Press, 2024). In high school, she interned at Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, the publishing house co-founded by Audre Lorde.*

MEDIA FEAR

Continued from Page 9

It's a mind-boggling contortion of logic. *The Times* doesn't say which aspects of Democrats' "progressive agenda" were so alienating to people. But the media all agreed — based largely on exit polls — that Republicans won because of the economy and immigration. The "persuasive message" and "vision … to improve the lives of all Americans" that Democrats failed to offer was pretty clearly an economic one. Which is exactly what progressives in the party have been pushing for the last decade: Medicare for All, a wealth tax, a living minimum wage, etc. In other words, if the Democrats had adopted a progressive agenda, it likely would have been their best shot at offering that vision to improve people's lives.

More likely, the paper was referring to "identity politics," which has been a media scapegoat for years — indeed, pundits roundly blamed Hillary Clinton's loss to Trump on identity politics (or "political correctness"). Then, as now, it was an accusation without evidence.

'DEMOCRATIC SELF-SABOTAGE'

At *The Washington Post*, columnist Matt Bai's answer to "Where Did Kamala Harris's Campaign Go Wrong?" was, in part, that "Democrats have dug themselves into a hole on cultural issues and identity politics," naming Trump's transphobic ads as evidence of that. (In a Post roundup of columnist opinions, Bai declared that Harris "couldn't outrun her party's focus on trans rights and fighting other forms of oppression.")

At the same time, Bai acknowledged that he does "think of Trump as being equally consumed with identity — just a different kind." Fortunately for Republicans, Bai and his fellow journalists never take their kind of identity politics as worth highlighting.

George Will, a never Trumper at *The Washington Post*, chalked up Harris' loss largely to "the Democratic Party's self-sabotage, via identity politics (race, gender), that made Harris vice president."

Bret Stephens, one of *The New York Times*' set of never Trumpers, likewise pointed a finger at Democrats' supposed tilt toward progressives and "identity." Much like other pundits, Stephens argued that "the politics of today's left is heavy on social engineering according to group identity."

Of the Harris campaigns' "tactical missteps," Stephens' first complaint was "her choice of a progressive running mate" — Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz. He also accused the party of a "dismissiveness toward the moral objections many Americans have to various progressive causes." Here he mentioned trans kids' rights; diversity, equity and inclusion seminars; and "new terminology that is supposed to be more inclusive," none of which Harris vocally embraced.

But underlying all these arguments is a giant fundamental problem: It's simply a fantasy (advanced repeatedly by Republicans) that Harris was running on identity politics, or as a radical progressive. News articles regularly acknowledged that Harris, in contrast to Hillary Clinton, for instance, shied away from centering her gender or ethnic background or appealing to identity in her campaign.

'WARY & ALIENATED'

The Times' own reporting made Harris' distancing from progressive politics perfectly clear in an article headlined, "As Harris Courts Republicans, the Left Grows Wary and Alienated." In a rare example of *The Times* centering a leftist perspective in a political article, reporters Nicholas Nehamas and Erica L. Green wrote:

> *In making her closing argument this month, Ms. Harris has campaigned four times with Liz Cheney, the Republican former congresswoman, stumping with her more than with any other ally. She has appeared more in October with the billionaire Mark Cuban than with Shawn Fain, the president of the United Auto Workers and one of the nation's most visible labor leaders.*
>
> *She has centered her economic platform on middle-class issues like small businesses and entrepreneurship rather than raising the minimum wage, a deeply held goal of many Democrats that polls well across the board. She has taken a harder-line stance on the border than has any member of her party in a generation and has talked more prominently about owning a Glock than about combating climate change. She has not broken from President Biden on the war Israel is waging in Gaza.*

Kamala Harris did not run as a progressive, either in terms of economic policy or identity politics. But to a corporate media that largely complemented rather than countered Trump's fear-based narratives on immigrants, trans people and crime, blaming the left is infinitely more appealing than recognizing their own culpability.

This article was originally published by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting on FAIR.org.

"To know him was to love him, and we do."
—Mark Hamill

***"A nuanced and meticulously detailed tribute…** Mining interviews with Hunt's friends, colleagues, and family, Stein perceptively captures how the puppeteer's edgy energy and unique, irreverent humor proved instrumental to the show's success, particularly as The Muppets transitioned toward more adult-centered programming in the 1970s."*
—Publishers Weekly

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COLLEGE FUN
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by Charles Busch
DECEMBER 16 @ 8PM

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by Andrea J. Fulton
DECEMBER 19- JANUARY 5
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DIVA THERAPY
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REVEREND BILLY'S REVELATIONS

RICHARD SWAFFORD

Dear Billy,
What's happening? I shudder to think what Trump's election victory will mean for us and the Earth too.

— KATE

Dear Kate,
Across the world, the super-rich are shooting down anything that moves to the left or just anything that threatens their money. The old idea of good government is gone, overwhelmed by greed. The way that politicians use fear to stupefy citizens is locked in by consumerism's media and fantastic lies.

Key to the economies that feed the rich is that the Earth is used for extraction and the dumping of toxic waste. The Earth's response has accelerated in 2023 and 2024 like never before. The heat rises and rises, with fire and flood, drought and starvation sweeping the globe. The greed only accelerates as the sixth extinction wipes out entire cities in a flash.

Where will this all lead? No question — the Earth will have its way. The elites simply have no idea: You can't use your habits of racism and classism on the Earth. They need to experience the power of a 200 mph storm. Writing here in *The Indypendent,* we can dream openly about new kinds of protesting. A 200 mph wind is one hell of a protest. Is the sixth extinction a kind of protester? As we get effective, we're called eco-terrorists.

The Earth will end the hoarding by the super-wealthy. Will there be a future of communities of anarchists who share what they have with ecosystems they protect? Is it inevitable that we have a science fiction nightmare, more of what we have now? AOC is right to suggest the thing to do now is serve our local communities, love our neighbors. Are all climate politics local?

Debra White Plume, the Oglala Lakota prophet, had this to say about what's coming: "Our elders were talking about it. There will come a time when the Earth will rise up with great force to rebalance, cleanse, to help life survive. And she will reach out and invite humans to work on the great changes with her. But then some humans will hesitate and not step through the door. And they wall disappear."

What form will our work take if we help the Earth? In the hottest year on record, 2024, what form would our protest take? Our Stop Shopping community thinks that music and new rituals will be part of it. But sometimes the whole thing is hard to picture.

— REV BILLY

■ ■ ■

Reverend Billy,
I hear you're closing down your storefront church on Avenue C. What's up with that? I attended some of the Sunday afternoon services that you all put on there and thought it was awesome.

— A LOWER EAST SIDE NEIGHBOR

Dear Neighbor,
It was a fascinating two-and-a-half years — the secular Earthchxrch experiment. Our songs, chants and my preachings all mixed together from the pressure of the weekly Earth service. We learned a lot about our work. A storefront in Loisaida: The floor-to-ceiling windows made for lots of waves and smiles, and we kept the door open so people could wander in. We would try to explain the Eartchxrch idea, and they would try to understand it. Had a kitchen there so we could make coffee... and a piano next to the big blue marble Earth picture.

The Baruch and Riis apartments wrap around that corner of the Village, so we got involved with protecting the local green space, the East River Park. We renamed the 70 trees now in harm's way the Jordan Nealy Grove (450 trees have been downed so far). We might find a new place in the neighborhood. Families like to walk to the Earthchxrch, like you did, on Sundays.

— BILLY

LABOR RISING

Continued from page 11

dramatic growth of *Labor Notes*, the election of militants to head a growing number of local and national unions, and the emergence of much-needed rank-and-file reform movements in unions like the UFCW.

Most notably, a reformed United Auto Workers led by Shawn Fain is going full steam ahead with its push to organize the auto industry across the South — an effort that will soon get a big boost when unionized Volkswagen workers finalize their first contract. Rank-and-file activists across the country can continue to point to the UAW, as well as other fighting unions, as an example that their unions should be emulating.

~ 6 ~

Young worker activism is not going away. Most of the labor upsurge since 2020 has been driven forward by Gen Z and Millennial workers radicalized by economic inequality, Bernie Sanders and racial-justice struggles. And contrary to what some have suggested, the 2024 election did not register a major shift to the right among young people, but rather a sharp drop in young Democratic turnout.

The recent proliferation of union campaigns across Amazon drivers is just the latest instance of a generational-driven uptick that continues to spread across Starbucks, higher ed, journalism and beyond. These "labor-pilled" young activists are unlikely to throw in the towel just because Trump is again in office. If anything, the dramatic failure of establishment Democratic politics (combined with the power deficits of ephemeral street protests) will likely grow the ranks of young people convinced that workplace organizing is the central axis for winning progressive change. And their efforts will continue to be boosted by projects like the Inside Organizer School, which trains salts to unionize targeted workplaces, and the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee, which helps any worker organize their job.

~ 7 ~

The (latent) power of unions to disrupt the political and economic system is high. Despite declines in union membership and density (the percentage of the workforce in a union), union members still have significant representation in critical sectors of the economy.

Labor's existing power provides a base for beating back the worst of Trump's attacks and expanding union representation to non-union workers in the semi-organized sectors. In addition, coordinated strikes or labor unrest in any of these sectors would significantly disrupt the functioning of the economy or public services, providing a potent tool for workers and unions. While logistically and legally difficult, workers and their unions have the power to shut down critical sectors of the economy if they so choose — an approach that could re-polarize the country around class lines instead of around Republican-fueled scapegoating.

~ 8 ~

Republicans may overplay their hand, creating new openings for labor. A scorched-earth attack on labor law may create unintended opportunities. For example, if the Supreme Court follows Elon Musk's bidding by throwing out the National Labor Relations Act — the primary law governing private sector organizing — states would have the power to enact union-friendly labor laws and legal restrictions on strikes and boycotts could be loosened. As Jennifer Abruzzo, the NLRB's general counsel, told *Bloomberg*, if the federal government steps away from protecting the right to organize, "I think workers are going to take matters into their own hands."

~ CONCLUSION ~

Labor's decades-long tendency to defensively hunker down is one of the major factors that has led our movement — and the country — into crisis. Turning things around will depend on pivoting to a new approach.

The strongest case for labor to scale up ambitious organizing efforts and disruptive strike action is not just that it's possible, but that it's necessary. Without increased initiatives to expand our base and to polarize the country around our issues, union density is sure to keep dropping. Organized labor's last islands of strength — from K-12 public education and the federal government, to UPS and Midwest auto — will become extremely vulnerable to attack. And unions will be forced to fight entirely on the political terrain chosen by Republicans, who will paint them as a narrow interest group of privileged employees beholden to "union bosses," Democratic leaders, and "woke" ideology.

Sometimes going on the offense is also the best form of defense. The best way to expose Trump's faux populism is by waging large-scale workplace battles that force all politicians to show which side they're on.

Nobody has a crystal ball about what lies ahead, nor should anybody underestimate the importance of defending our movement — and all working people — against Trump's looming attacks. But it's not factually or tactically justified to dismiss the potential for labor advance over the next four years.

Conditions overall remain favorable for labor growth, despite Trump's re-election. Political contexts matter, but so do factors like the economy, high public support for unions, labor's deep financial pockets, the growth of union reform efforts, labor's continued disruptive capacity and the spread of young worker activism. Rebuilding a powerful labor movement remains our best bet to defeat Trumpism, reverse rampant inequalities and transform American politics. Now is not the time for retreat.

Chris Bohner is a union researcher and activist. Eric Blanc is an assistant professor of labor studies at Rutgers University. He blogs at the Substack Labor Politics *and is author of* We Are The Union: How Worker-to-Worker Organizing Is Revitalizing Labor and Winning Big.

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